

Allison Coupon Company of Indianapolis, IN

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During the summer of 1987, Doug Cutler, Helen and I toured the Mount Prospect, IL manufacturing plant of Cummins-Allison Corporation. B.F. Cummins Perforator Company had been founded in 1887 and became the major producer of perforator machines in the United States. The Allison Coupon Company was established around 1888. As a result the companies were celebrating a joint centennial about that time. The *Perfins Bulletin* of April, 1988 had a long article Doug wrote describing the many things we learned regarding the Cummins perforators. His article ended with a listing of areas where information was still needed. This will answer some of his questions concerning the Allison Coupon Company of Indianapolis, In.

In 1980, I made a small investment in Foam Cutting Engineers, Inc., a company begun by a former business associate of mine. He retired as president of the company and continued to serve as Chairman. Late in 1986, the replacement President suffered a stroke and died. Phil Allen, an executive from Cummins-Allison, was available at that time and became the new president of Foam Cutting. Shortly thereafter, I was added to the board of the company and also served as corporate secretary. When I mentioned to Phil our search for the records of the "Bureau of Identification" of the Cummins Perforator Company. Phil suggested that an officer of the Glenview State Bank (another Cummins-American subsidiary) was the man to contact. Unfortunately, while living in Illinois, Helen and I failed to follow up on this.

On the weekend prior to Thanksgiving, we went over to the Chicago area for a Foam Cutting stockholders meeting. Phil Allen was ill and unable to attend. Among the new directors elected to the board was Joe Panarale -- another executive with Cummins-Allison. Needless to say, Helen lit up like a Christmas tree and at the end of the meeting, went dashing over to Joe's table to introduce herself

and explain her interest in perfins. She told him that Phil Allen had mentioned that a top bank officer might have custody of the "Bureau of Identification" records. Joe promptly wrote down the name of Jim Mentzer and the address of the Glenview State Bank.

Monday morning found us packed up and headed toward Kettering and home. But on our way, about three miles south of Techny, we stopped at the Glenview State Bank. When we went inside and asked for Mr. Mentzer, we were promptly told that Mr. Mentzer was "expecting us" and we were directed to his office on an upper floor. Apparently Joe had called him. We can not imagine what Joe said, but we certainly received a "Royal" welcome.

Mr. Mentzer informed us that the "Bureau of Identification" files were not in the bank vault and probably had been disposed of when Cummins moved from Chicago to Mount Prospect. He then presented us with photocopies of several pages telling of the background of the Allison Coupon Company. However, he mentioned that the "real story" lies elsewhere. His brief outlining of that story has lead me to do a lot of research. Hope to have it ready in time for the next issue.

He then asked if we went near Indianapolis on our trip back home. When we said that we pass right by it. He said we should check with his son, John Mentzer, Vice President Administration of Allison Coupon. Pushing a button on his phone, his son's secretary in the Allison Coupon Company in Indianapolis answered. Being told that his son was in a meeting, Mr. Mentzer instructed her to get him out of that meeting -- "I have some people in my office he should talk with." We just about fainted, but that is how our meeting with the son was arranged.

By the time we got to Indianapolis, it was almost 5 O'Clock. Following the instructions we had been given, we soon found the plant. Mr. Mentzer greeted us warmly and took us into a large conference room and for 45 minutes we were fascinated by the history of the Allison Company.

James W. Allison, the founder of the Allison family in Indiana, arrived in Worthington, Indiana from England around 1840. He reportedly operated a fleet of river boats between Worthington and Louisville, Ky. Worthington is little more than half

way between Indianapolis and Vincennes. His boats would have had to travel on the West Fork of the White River, join up with the Wabash River twenty five miles below Vincennes, then down to the Ohio, and then go upstream to Louisville. Difficult, but probably better than going by foot in those days.

In 1846, a son, Noah was born. In 1858, the family moved to Hillsdale, MI, where the father operated a wholesale grocery. Noah worked in his father's business and married in 1870. The Allison moved several more times, finally settling in Indianapolis in 1880. In 1882, Noah and Benjamin Nixon formed a knitting and hosiery manufacturing company. The following year saw the establishment of the Allison Company.

Realizing that the American economy was becoming more complex, and that much business was being done on credit with debtors who were really not credit worthy, Noah became involved with the American Creditors Association in 1885. Within two years he was President of the association. In addition, he began to edit and publish the *Indiana Trade Review*. Having free time on his press, Noah reviewed his business experiences and came up with a great idea for a "specialized" printing business.

Being aware that many people handled their money poorly, Noah worked with a number of local merchants and developed coupon books which were sold by the merchants at a discount. This made it possible for a person to get more groceries than if he used cash. The merchant got his payment in advance and the customer was also happy. There was soon a demand for coupon books from retailers, mine and mill operators, and company stores throughout the nation. With the company booming, Noah suffered an untimely death in 1890. Noah's wife and three sons took over as officers of the firm, with a prominent local attorney acting as president and manager. The business prospered to such an extent that, during the next ten years, five moves to larger quarters were made.

Between 1904 and 1924, Panama Canal workers were paid in part with Allison Coupon Books. Army posts throughout the country used Allison Coupon Books on paydays. When installment loans were introduced in 1919 -- Allison Coupon Books provided the prepayment coupons. If you have ever bought a General Motors automobile on time, you

probably used Allison Coupon Books because the firm began to provide the payment books for the General Motors Acceptance Corporation way back in 1922.

Except for one son whose interest in the coupon company was bought out, Noah's children and grandchildren operated the business until it was sold in 1963 to the Cummins-American Corp. But, as Jim Mentzer said, "the real story lies in the Allison who 'got away'." That story will appear in our next issue.

We wish to thank Jim and John Mentzer for their invaluable assistance in preparing this report. And thanks to Joe Panarale for the introduction.



PERFINNED
BUSINESS CARD

A recent item in *The Wall Street Journal* mentioned that Cummins-Allison Corporation had been awarded a judgement in a federal court in Chicago of \$10.5 million plus interest in a coin-sorting machine patent infringement case against Brandt, Inc. a Bensalem, PA corporation. Brandt has filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code in Madison, WI.

It is a good thing we do not have to worry about patents when it comes to collecting precancels or perfins.

Editor's note: The next issue referred to in this article was the next issue of *The Illinois Precancel News*. We will publish the follow-up as space permits.